

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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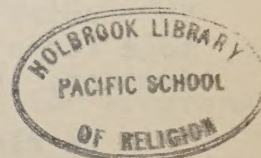
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## THE VALUE PROBLEM IN RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Roy C. Buck\*



Wherever we turn in the history of man, we find evidences of a continuous striving to overcome the forces of nature and human weakness. To harness nature for man's use and to build a community of good people provide the motivation and rationale for much of our social, economic, and political life.

Every society has some sort of value context in which this activity takes place. For the western world the Judeo-Christian tradition is the basis. The Protestant interpretation of this tradition is the major thrust in our own society. Much of what we think of as being American values, or even rural values, are Protestant in origin and can be found in other western societies or in urban areas.

The religious frame of reference is useful in analyzing the value problem. It provides certain themes which can be traced through the history of civilization. It is possible, therefore, to see how society functions in relation to a given theme over an extended period of time.

The church is extremely helpful in that its function is to keep alive the several value themes associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The church feels responsible to speak to the problems of human existence and to judge the quality of the human condition. The secular community feels constantly the pressure of this judgment. Thus, there is in us all a consciousness of God's eternal judgment in all of its Old Testament harshness and New Testament compassion.

The community development emphasis in rural life lends itself especially well to consideration of the value problem. We can very well ask: "Community development for what?" Here we set the stage for a discussion of man's motivation for progress. What is to be gained

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by improving the level of living of an area? Does full employment always mean that the social and economic life of an area is improved? How can a community experience the rewards of secular success and progress and not lose its own soul? These are not pious questions of practical irrelevance. They cut to the heart of the problem of continued human existence. They are practical questions we must all face.

One might well reason that if God ever had a chosen people they must have been the Americans. No country has ever accumulated the material wealth and physical well-being to the extent which we have in our history. No country has made the rewards of science and technology so available to a large number of people. No country has been so removed from wars, famines, revolutions, chronic poverty, exploitation, and ignorance.

On almost any measure one wishes to use we have been and are a fortunate people. United States sprang practically full blown into the world scene as a major power. In the short historic span of two centuries we have built a life and culture of dazzling accomplishment. We worked hard. We believed that man had the manifest destiny to make the most of his human potential and to extract from the earth its resources for the good of all.

A philosophy of economic competition developed as the guiding motif for all this endeavor. Every man was indoctrinated from birth that it was his mission to rise above his past and to leave a bigger pile than he received. Competition was and continues to be one of the core elements of American philosophy. The corollary of competition, the supreme dignity of the individual regardless of station in life, helps to keep the American system alive. Indeed, it may be the vital factor which makes our way of life sensible.

The search for self-fulfillment, the belief that man can solve the riddle of the Garden of Eden, has in no country had the continued attention as in the United States.

One can well imagine what it was like on that misty morning in the Garden. Adam and Eve wandering through the fields and forests, feeling the completeness of God's perfect experiment, began to think. It is probably historical accident that Eve is charged with leading Adam on. We are told, however, that she was enamoured by the tree of knowledge and that like us all she wanted to share it with someone. In other words, Eve couldn't resist the temptation to ask the question, "Why? Why me? Why Adam? Why?" Adam and Eve began to wonder and in this wondering the covenant was broken. God upset the equilibrium of Eden and dared Adam and Eve to restore it. He dared them to play God.

This is the beginning of community development. This is the eternal riddle of Eden. The sin of Adam and Eve then is the human challenge of God's omnipotent position. The heritage of Adam and Eve is our culture, our science, technology, literature, art, and all the other residue of man's struggle to find the answer.

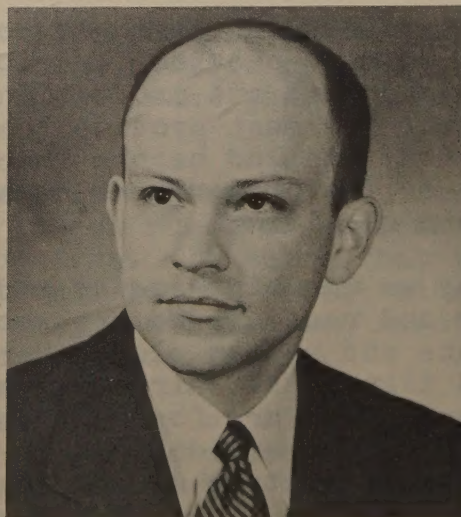


Christianity does not provide an answer for the riddle. It points to a way of living with it. Jesus symbolizes another attempt on the part of God to create perfection. Jesus, unlike Adam and Eve, did not break under temptation. He suffered the cross of man. In this historic event God triumphed. In the wake of the cross Christianity sprang up. It preached of God's forgiveness, God's love for man, God's pity for man. Christianity did not stand in opposition to civilization. Its major thrust was that of reminding people of what they are doing and to remain humble in the eyes of God in spite of secular progress. The sin of Eden is on us all. Christianity teaches us how to live with it.

Now what does all this have to do with the value problem in community development? This is not an easy question to answer. The relationships between action programs and values and beliefs are not all clear. There is one factor that does stand out, however. Action programs are the product of men's minds. They represent attempts to solve problems of human existence. They grow out of human value orientations and judgments. Action programs are objective evidence of what are the interests and concerns of humanity.

Churches, schools, public and private agencies, organizations, and all the network of community life are evidences of man's attempts to solve the riddle of Eden. It cannot be denied that the work has been fruitful. Our plane of living is evidence enough. We are here today not in fear of our fellows. Laws and customs have made us an orderly people. We exist in a man-created social order. We cannot exist apart from it. We are not sufficient unto ourselves. We need each other. Now this is the problem. It is in the contest of the community that the value problem is observable. The community is always to some extent restrictive on individual action. The norms of community life throttle the individual goal, fancy, or whim. It is in the context of community that values become manifest.

In the life of heavy emphasis on community organization and other forms of social engineering, every group, institution, and agency needs to evaluate its moral, philosophic, and religious position. It is to the group that man looks more and more for his cues for action. We are less than ever before masters of our own fate. We are not only in the community. We are of it. This means that our community services and agencies need not only be concerned with solving the short run problems of income, crime, health, education, recreation, and so on; but we must be more concerned about the more profound problems dealing with man's concern for goals beyond the pocketbook and creature comforts.



Dr. Roy C. Buck



In our economy of abundance, in our orderly community, in our technological comfort, we must diligently search for the timeless values which make life bearable. We need to busy ourselves with this task. In the minds of many it is an open question as to whether the American community could withstand an all-out attack on its way of life. What do we believe in strongly enough that would carry us through a time of moral and ethical challenge? Who can say anything in tones of more significance than the tinkling cymbal?

One does not have to go far from home to find that the old patterns of ideology no longer have the impact of former years. Memorial day speeches, commencement addresses, political rallies, declarations of purpose of organizations in many instances have an archaic and outmoded quality. These are not discordant notes in the horn of plenty. They are slurred or sometimes overlooked completely. There need to be written new scores.

The American community needs a new sense of mission, a new destiny. The 19th century battles are won. The traditional frontiers no longer provide the spirit of mission and calling. World War II and Korea wrung down the curtain on an era in our civilization. The shooting stopped, but the war continued. The weapons no longer kill the body. The weapons of words dull the spirit, dampen the motivation, turn dreams into nightmares of anxiety. Words as weapons eat away at the minds of men. Perspective is lost. Life is a day-to-day routine. Like Alice in Wonderland, we wear ourselves out running so that we may stay in place.

There needs to be opened up a vast new area of value and meaning to human existence. The challenges of 19th century Protestant ethics and New England piety need to be judged for their mid-twentieth century space age relevance. There must be more to life than work, thrift, and fear of God. When is work unproductive? When is thrift false? When is fear of God a tribal ritual? We must face the fact that hard work just may not be sufficient for passage to Heaven. A-penny-saved-is-a-penny-earned economic philosophy may not carry us through the years ahead. A tribal fear of God is an insult to His divine plan for man.

In the cluttered community of material abundance which we all experience, we must provide for elbow room of the mind and spirit. We have to learn that the production of hard goods is not the sole test of man's worth. We must provide the means whereby the sense of beauty, love, wisdom, and God become functional realities in the life of man. They must be the property of us all. They must be part of the day-to-day pattern of living.

Today we worship science and the rational decision. We honor objectivity and reason. We are secure when science makes an advance. But science and reason play a hard game with man. They scrape away the myths and illusions. Air castles come tumbling down. Soil is for crop production. Cows are for milk and meat. Electricity heats the water. Things and people are defined in terms of function, how they are used. The problem of content of meaning beyond use is not a relevant question in this scientific era. Beauty, love, wisdom, and God could very well become alien values in a society dedicated to the philosophy that the values associated only with objectivity and unimpassioned thought have relevance to the contemporary community.



What has been said must not be confused with a yearning for a reactionary, moss-back philosophy. Country life and agriculture, if they are to continue to hold important positions in American life, must make the necessary adjustments to capitalize on the changes in ways of living and making a living. Adjustments must not only be made in the economic and social life of the community, but also in its moral, intellectual, and spiritual life.

We are not advocating a compromise position where convictions and beliefs are weakened. We are saying, however, that the traditional means of value experience no longer fit our time. The gap between beliefs and practices is widening. We want to be just in dealing with our fellows, but are fearful of the consequence of justice. This sets up a situation where we smile at human weakness and inefficiency and write them off as "human nature."

The cold war with our political foes across the ocean has provided a model for many little cold battles here at home. Every day in the rural press, and in hundreds of meetings, the cold war of ideological differences with regard to country life and agriculture is being fought.

There are those in the camp of Thomas Jefferson and those who see Alexander Hamilton as their patron saint. The former group waves its flag for the family farm and all of its associated values, while the latter group works hard at redefining agriculture and country life to fit the emerging industrial-urban way of life. The possibility of marrying these points of view is aired on occasion. The problem seems to be one of finding the formula by which we can have our cake and eat it too.

Can the traditional values associated with the craft-like agricultural economy of the 19th century be hooked to the efficiency orientation of the farm firm? Can the traditional conservatism of the rural village be operative in the expanding rural community where the forces of the market place and the business world give direction to the day-to-day life?

It would appear that there is little hope in attempting to unite the specific values of one period with the specific practices of another. This is bound to produce at the worst a two-faced people and at the best a frustrated people.

If one generalizes beyond the specifics of the hoe culture of our ancestors, the value questions are no longer rural or agricultural. They have to do with man's ultimate concerns. It seems that this is the heart of the issue. The problem is not one of rural values but rather one of what values, beliefs, norms, and myths are needed to guide people through the present and on into the future.

Is there hope for the development of a way of life in the human community that will yield for each person, regardless of occupation, or station, the fullest sense of self-fulfillment? What kinds of value or orientations does a community development program need to provide avenues for full use of our God-given potential?



The community is a product of man. It is, therefore, subject to, and has built into it, the weaknesses resulting from man's insufficiency. This is inevitable. Communities reflect man's advancement since the fall of Adam and Eve. But the direction is not toward Eden; it is away from Eden. The human community is man's handiwork. It is his image of Eden resulting from a man-to-man covenant. It is civilization.

Man is master in the human community. But in this power position there is likely to be experienced a terrible emptiness of purpose. The barns are full. The milk check is increased. The mortgage is paid. The children are happily married. But what does it add up to? What is next? This is the question to which we addressed ourselves at the outset of this discussion. After all the problems of creature comforts are solved, there remains the problem of man trying to live with himself; and there is the problem of man's relationship to God. These are more than church questions. They are at the root of all the problems man encounters in his earthly existence.

Community development, therefore, cannot thrive for long on being concerned only for the short run human needs. In addition, community development must be concerned about man and his destiny. Ultimately each of us has to face our moments of truth. It may be in the doctor's office, in the funeral home, or with a loved one. The point is that there is no escape from having to stand alone before God and make decisions involving the highest stakes. Whatever else community development is, it must help man to face decision.

Decision is an apparently uniquely human attribute. Values are implicit in all decision-making. Good and bad, right and wrong are ever present in the decision-making process. There is a hidden paradox. A closer examination reveals that the problem is never a choice between right and wrong. It is one of choosing the lesser of two evils. When man comes to full appreciation of this predicament, he will understand that to be human is to be less than perfect. This should greatly reduce the possibility of man flaunting his power and his ability. An appreciation of human limitations should go a long way toward maintaining a humble approach to the problems man faces.

Workers in the area of community development who bring only scientific and practical knowledge to bear on human problems fill the sandals of Adam. The moral and theological aspects of decision-making have to be included. All the science and government subsidy a society can muster won't solve the chronic human problems. Underneath the seeming prosperity and veneered good life in the community there remains the gnawing questions of value and meaning to life.

Western civilization, and America in particular, has a style of life which is testimony to man's skill in conquering nature. The earthly forces have been brought under control to a large extent. Outstanding accomplishments in the area of social and economic control are observable. Art in all of its forms flourishes in western society. Everywhere one turns the hand of man is evident. The challenge to Adam has survived the centuries. But in this struggle of man to create his own Eden there remains the big frustration that Adam faced. Does man think he is playing God?



Answers to the question posed above are not easy to come by because another uniquely human trait is that of rationalizing one's acts. Justification of one's action before the community is a constant pressure.

In truth there is falsehood. In honesty there is dishonesty. In virtue there is vice. This is to be human. A life of truth is impossible in our society. A life of falsehood is also impossible. People have a right to know this and be concerned. In awareness of human limitation is the hope for the community. In the knowledge that the very best that man can do will fall short of perfection, there will develop the values that will insure a significant human integrity. In the knowledge that in the most depraved there is an element of the divine, there will develop values that will insure compassion one for another.

This brief sketch of the value problem has only scratched the surface of an area which has by and large been neglected in community organization. It would appear that the case is hopeless for building a human community in which there is perfection. A value orientation which has as its goal perfection or permanent problem solution will be bound to fail. Social planners, organizational leaders, all of us need to recognize that the value orientation necessary for the life which is the lesser evil is one which clearly defines for man his man-to-man responsibility and his responsibility to God.

Adam failed God. Out of the failure sprang the human community. The overconfidence of Adam snapped the divine cord which bound God and man. Man has been and will continue to struggle to bind the frayed ends. The comfort in this struggle is to know one's own weakness. In this there is a kind of victory.

Only upon a sound analysis of the human situation can a meaningful life be built. The patience to do the analysis is the problem. We hurry on with treatment before the seat of the trouble is probed. In this there is bound to be failure. Much of what passes for community development today is designed in the hope that somehow the formula for the good life will be discovered. In this then is defeat.

Community development in the long run must concern itself with the whole of human existence. It must aid in bringing to the surface the whole of human frustration. It must be a kind of pilgrimage in search of meaning to life itself. In this there are no clearly defined roles. It is not a program. It is life itself. Community development ought not to have the specificity of a program. It is an ongoing drama in which everyone plays out his part. Every man is a supporting player in a dialogue with God.

This paper has been an attempt to cast the value question in a framework which is not built upon the traditional cultural norms of the community. It moved ahead on the assumption that man's values fluctuate around two core ideas; the uniqueness of man in the natural and the omnipotent position of God.



The unique feature of man is his self-awareness or consciousness, his ability to reflect on himself as a creature in the world but not completely of it. He has a sense of being which transcends other forms of life. Man sees himself as a spiritual being as well as a natural phenomenon. He is conscious of his social nature living one with another. He is aware of the moral aspects of human existence. And he appreciates in himself the presence of a mind capable of creative thought far in excess of other forms of animal life. In this self-awareness man fills his life with meaning. He assigns value to the world around him. He develops guiding principles by which to live.

The value problem will never be resolved. The most that can be hoped for, and indeed this may be enough, is that man continues to ask significant questions about himself and his destiny. In these questions there is hope for man to continue to dream of the community of perfection, the community that transcends the limitations of man; but there is also the stark reality of God's continual judgment. In this state of tension man must live. Community development, whatever its form, must grow out of a recognition of this tension in all of its everlastingness.

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#### Timely Thoughts Related to the Rural Community

If the time comes when, in your community and mine, we are left only with the restraint found in our own hearts, then our only hope will be that men, as individuals, will stand above the plans and calculations of developmental change, and be naturally predisposed to be upright and just. Whatever more particular reasons community institutions and organizations are for, their perhaps unwritten human charters, as agents of human society, is that they must be ultimately devoted to the human condition and experience.

--Paul A. Miller

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Across the American countryside men built small communities which became centers of service to the individuals who worked the surrounding farm lands. In these communities, as in the farm lands that supported them, the people built churches in which to worship, they created schools in which to teach their young, and they formed units of local government through which they could handle their public business. All of these activities and institutions were designed to promote the welfare of the individual, and were carefully fashioned so that the individual could play an important role in their development and maintenance.

--Richard W. Poston

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